



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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VIEQUES CRITICAL TO MILITARY READINESS

Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee Floyd Spence released the following statement upon the release of the report to the Secretary of Defense from the Special Panel on Military Operations on Vieques:

"I am deeply disturbed with the Rush Panel's recommendations because of the negative impact they will have, if implemented, on the readiness of our Naval forces. Absent an alternative training site that can provide equivalent training, an alternative which our military leaders have indicated does not exist, I must strongly disagree with the central tenet underlying the panel's recommendations that operations should cease at Vieques within 5 years.

"My primary concern is the readiness of our fighting forces. The weapons training facilities on Vieques offer the best, and most realistic, training available anywhere on the East Coast. The Navy has already testified that this facility is the only place available to East Coast forces for training in several warfare competencies essential for combat readiness – most importantly live ordnance integrated and combined arms training. There is no viable alternative.

"The April accident that killed Mr. Sanes-Rodriguez and injured four other Navy employees was a tragedy. There are steps that can and should be taken to increase the safety of operations on and around Vieques. I strongly support all such initiatives. However, I urge the Secretary of Defense and the President to ultimately reject the Rush Panel's recommendations, to take the steps necessary to increase safety of its training operations on Vieques and to ensure that the Navy can get on with the critical business of training its forces."

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